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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: GLOOMY COMMERCIAL FARMERS' UNION CONGRESS ADJOURNS
AS SECTION 8 EVICTION DEADLINE LOOMS

Classified By: CHG REWhitehead due to 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. The 59th annual Commercial Farmers, Union (CFU) Congress was a gloomy affair that took place under the pall of an August 8 deadline for the eviction of the majority of CFU members from their farms. There was unusual division within CFU ranks over whether or not to mount court challenges to the eviction orders as well as to an expensive and compulsory worker retrenchment package, or whether to continue the elected CFU leadership, thus far fruitless attempt at non-confrontational dialogue with the GOZ. There was also a split between farmers who will remain on their farms in defiance of the deadline, and those who had chosen to vacate. Acting Agriculture Minister Ignatius Chombo and several other ZANU-PF heavyweights attended the closing ceremony, which was addressed by Vice President Joseph Msika. His remarks contained little new, and yielded nothing promising on the looming Section 8 deadline. Msika concluded with a pointed threat to the Justice for Agriculture (JAG) group, which has split from the CFU and favors legal confrontation with the GOZ. In his response, CFU President Cloete pitched for dialogue and an extension of the eviction deadline, which prompted a scornful response from Chombo and other GOZ hardliners in a following press interview. CFU leaders attempted to put a positive spin on Msika's more conciliatory remarks -- a stretch from where we sat -- as what may have been the last CFU Congress adjourned. End summary.

A Mournful Affair

2. (SBU) Econoff attended preliminary open sessions of the CFU Congress, and the Charge participated in the closing ceremony. It was a gloomy affair overall, given that the first tranche of 1,800 of the CFU's remaining 3,000 plus members were facing a midnight August 8 deadline to vacate their farms, totaling some 2,500 properties, or face fines and possible imprisonment. The strain of the deadline compounded by three years of violence and stress had clearly taken their toll on the CFU. In closed sessions, there were reportedly deep internal fissures in what has traditionally been a very cohesive group. The sessions featured heated exchanges over whether or not the CFU should challenge exorbitant GOZ-mandated retrenchment packages for their farms workers in court, or whether the increasingly cash-strapped farmers should pay the severance, as mandated by law, before leaving their properties. The CFU took no formal decision on whether members should leave their farms before the eviction deadline, largely because there was a lack of consensus on this point. Some delegates stated that they intended to defy the deadline, while others said that they would vacate temporarily and see what transpired.

Msika Calls for Unity, Then Rattles the Saber

3. (SBU) A surprisingly top-heavy ZANU-PF delegation composed of VP Msika (acting President in Mugabe's absence); Minister of Local Government, Works, and Housing (and acting Agriculture Minister) Ignatius Chombo; hard-line Mashonaland West Chaneetsa, and Minister of State Olivia Muchena attended the closing ceremony. Following an oleaginous introduction by Chombo and a fulsome welcome by CFU President Colin Cloete, Msika proceeded to review GOZ policy over the past year, including the Section 5 and 8 seizure mechanism and the mandated limitations on farm sizes. He stressed that the fast track land reform program would move forward to completion but that it would respect its own internal regulations. He made no specific mention of any grace period for the August 8 deadline but noted that the GOZ has delisted 689 farms comprising a total of 1.69 million hectares

4. (SBU) Msika expressed the GOZ's willingness to continue dealing with the Zimbabwean Joint Resettlement Initiative (ZJRI), a CFU-backed attempt to identify and donate

commercial farmland for resettlement, complete with a financial package to assist the resettled farmers start up. However, he criticized the slowness of the effort and the limited amount of land offered up and accused the CFU of resisting land reform from the outset. Msika added that he hoped that within the next year the "white" CFU and the "indigenous" Zimbabwean Farmers' Union would be blended into a single organization. He delivered a blunt warning to the "small clique amongst you") clearly the dissident JAG -- who favored confrontation with government over dialogue. He stressed that they would face "the full wrath of the law" and that the government would not be deterred from action by external influence.

15. (SBU) On a more conciliatory note, Msika declared that he was not and had never been a racist, that he deplored racism, and that his reference to "our people" extended across the color line to all Zimbabweans. He further insisted that there was room and space for all who wished to stay and encouraged CFU members who wished to farm to complete and submit the required forms expeditiously, or even to contact his office. He announced that no one would be rendered homeless by the land reform process.

The Response

16. (SBU) CFU President Cloete responded by pointing out that the CFU had always opted for dialogue with the GOZ, which until recently had been refused. He noted that the GOZ had offered no mechanism through which lands identified by the ZJRI could be transferred. He bemoaned the chaos and warlordism associated with the fast track program, and lamented the breakdown of law and order that had translated into violence against, and even the murder of, many farmers. Cloete rejected the confrontational approach of the JAG and said that the CFU stood ready to work with the Government. He urged the Government to re-examine the Section 8 deadline before it came into effect.

17. (SBU) A representative of the commercial farmers of Namibia delivered a pledge of solidarity for the CFU and requested concrete proposals on how their Namibian counterparts could be of assistance. A Mr. Roth representing Agric SA, a South African counterpart group, subsequently took the floor and in an unexpected turn of events proceeded to lambaste the GOZ for "outrageous economic policies that were ruining Zimbabwe and harming the region." He continued in the same vein, with the CFU leaders at the head table squirming and the ZANU-PF heavyweights in the front row increasingly outraged as Roth blasted the "wimpy" South African Government for its lack of response and castigated "other countries represented here" for sitting on their hands.

The Fallout

18. (C) Charge spoke with CFU Vice Presidents Douglas Taylor-Freeme and William Hughes following the ceremony. Taylor-Freeme, who has been on and off his farm in the volatile Chinhoyi region for several months, confirmed that he would pass the weekend at Lake Kariba and take stock of what follows. Hughes said that he would return to his farm an hour outside of Harare and take his chances. He explained that the farm was valued at Zimbabwe dollar 1.4 billion (USD 2 million at the parallel rate) and that he and his family had no holdings of any kind outside of Zimbabwe. He had no choice but to stick it out, although he hoped that if he were forcibly expelled, it would be by police arrest and not mob action. Taylor-Freeme estimated that 1,200-1,400 of the 1,800 affected were still on their farms, but he did not have accurate information on how many would stay put in spite of the deadline. Both he and Hughes believed that violent episodes were unlikely, but could only speculate on hotspots or the potential magnitude of the problem. The outcome would determine how other CFU members remaining on their farms would react as their own Section 8 deadlines fell due.

19. (C) Hughes was surprisingly upbeat on Msika's remarks, focusing on the "room for all" and positive ZJRI rhetoric. He admitted that the "no one left homeless" remark was mystifying, in that a large number of farmers who had been driven off their farms before the Section 8 deadline are for all practical purposes already homeless. Hughes said that many others are either broke or deeply in debt, their plight further aggravated by the GOZ-mandated retrenchment packages. He scoffed at Msika's mention of 689 Section 8 delistings, noting that this had been handled strictly along color lines and that virtually all beneficiaries have been indigenous Zimbabwean farmers. He said that 98 percent of non-indigenous farms have been listed and offered the view that the remaining two percent had been temporarily spared by administrative oversights.

110. (C) The ZANU-PF contingent marched out in formation immediately after the closing session, and their take can only be judged from the government press, which accurately reflected Msika,s remarks. It also quoted Chombo as labeling the Congress as "lily white" and "racist" with "raw attitudes" that "refuse to share land." Minister of State Olivia Muchena echoed him, accusing the CFU members of "racist tactics" and predicting that "what is happening in Zimbabwe is also going to take place to white racist farmers in South Africa."

Comment

111. (C) The CFU appeared dispirited, unusually disorganized, and increasingly a spent force. Neither Taylor-Freeme nor Hughes could provide precise figures on how many CFU members remain on the farms or how many have already emigrated, a startling admission from an organization that a year ago was probably the best organized and informed lobby in Zimbabwe. Hughes, who is leaving his Vice Presidential slot, said that the CFU executive is downsizing and that he will not be replaced. The CFU has been unable to find a qualified replacement for its public relations director, who defected to JAG, and has no accurate figures on how many of its members have actually followed her lead. Cloete made it clear, however, that despite these challenges the CFU leadership remains committed to dealing non-confrontationally with the GOZ. As Hughes pointed out, Mugabe himself has already stated that the GOZ will not respect court decisions that it does not agree with, and the regime has at its disposal all the forces required to counter a strategy of confrontation.

112. (C) Hughes' attempt at a positive take on Msika,s remarks struck us as grasping at straws. Msika said nothing new in the speech, and his rhetoric about space for all, unity, and a home for everyone has not been borne out by developments on the ground. Barring a prompt and radical GOZ policy change over the next few days, highly unlikely in Mugabe,s absence, we take Msika,s statements as words for the wind. The ZANU-PF instinct for crushing any opposition to its monopoly on power, so ably displayed in its dealings with the MDC, would appear to extend to the CFU as well. The question that was never answered at the glum 59th CFU Congress was whether or not this would be its last. End
Comment.
WHITEHEAD